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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 000500

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/02/2015  
TAGS: [PTER](#) [KISL](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BG](#) [BG](#)  
SUBJECT: BYE BYE BANGLA BHAI?

REF: A. 04 DHAKA 01697  
[1](#)B. 04 DHAKA 1618

Classified By: P/E Counselor D.C. McCullough, Reason: 1.5 d

- [1](#)1. (C) Summary: After a six-month hiatus, self-styled Islamist vigilante Bangla Bhai is back in the news. An embarrassed BDG has reiterated orders for his arrest, but it is unclear if this embarrassment is enough to bring to heel the politically-connected mystery man. End Summary.
- [1](#)2. (C) In May 2004, Bangla Bhai (BB), a self-styled vigilante appeared in Rajshahi division proclaiming his protection for average Bangladeshis against violent criminals, drug trafficking, and other "social evils." He and his armed followers dispensed "justice," killing mostly members of the Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP/East Bengal Communist Party), who are the enemies of BB's alleged political supporter, Deputy Law Minister Q.T. Dulu. In May 2004, State Minister for Home Affairs Babar told Rajshahi police superintendent Masud Miah to tell journalist that there was an arrest order out for BB. Miah reportedly replied: "We will arrest him if he comes open" (ref A). PM Zia personally affirmed an arrest order two weeks later in a meeting with SA A/S Rocca, predicting that the arrest was imminent (ref B).
- [1](#)3. (SBU) Bangla Bhai, however, remained at large, albeit underground, and reports of his actions largely disappeared from media reports. At the same time, his group, the Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB/Awakened Muslim People of Bangladesh), continued to operate, although at a lower level of activity.
- [1](#)4. (SBU) Recently, JMJB activity appeared to rebound. In mid January, a folk theater (viewed by extremists as un-Islamic) at Laxikola village in Shahjahanpur Upazilla was bombed, killing two persons and wounding 70. An alleged member of the Islamist militant organization Jamatul Mujahidin, which has reputed ties to JMJB, was arrested and reportedly took credit for this attack. In late January, there were reports JMJB members attempted to kill Mokbul Hossain Mridha, in Sripur Union Parishad, for refusing to quit the Awami League. On January 25, in Bhabaniganj in Bagmara, Rajshahi police allegedly clashed with JMJB as they organized a procession to protest a January 22 lynching of three JMJB members. According to press reports, police used rubber bullets and tear gas to disperse JMJB members. After this first clash with police, who in the past have often helped the JMJB, JMJB leaders reportedly vowed retaliation against the police.
- [1](#)5. (SBU) Shortly after the New York Times Sunday magazine published an article on January 23 prominently featuring Bangla Bhai, State Minister for Home Affairs Babar reiterated the arrest order for BB, saying, "We have made a clear and clean order to arrest him." When asked about JMJB, he denied its existence: "We don't officially know about the existence the JMJB." Newspapers reported that police have orders also to arrest BB followers.
- [1](#)6. (SBU) According to several civil society contacts, BB and his followers retain a level of local popularity because of their actions against the PBCP, a violent group infamous for extortion and other criminal acts. Moreover, in this deeply devout rural area, there is an audience for self-proclaimed defenders of traditional Islamic values.
- [1](#)7. (SBU) BB has entered the folklore as a fearsome bearded avenger, inspiring shake-down attempts or threats from people claiming to act in his name. In late January, for example, the chief of a USAID sponsored NGO received a death threat from someone who signed it "Bangla Bhai." The chief, noting the threatening letter's Dhaka postmark, eventually determined that it was a hoax, perhaps from a rival NGO.
- [1](#)8. (C) Comment: Jamaat Islami initially denied any connection with Bangla Bhai, and then, along with some BDG officials like Home Minister of State Babar, began maintaining there was no such person as Bangla Bhai, despite numerous BB sightings to the contrary. After a six-month hiatus, reports of new activities by BB's group returned to the media just as the NYT magazine article appeared. To underscore his resolve about finding BB, Babar told Ambassador he would send RAB to do the job; Ambassador urged that BB be brought to justice and not become another victim of RAB "crossfire" killings. The BDG is embarrassed by the new focus on BB, but it is unclear if that embarrassment is enough to bring BB to heel.

